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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000249

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SUBJECT: TURKEY AND THE IRAQI KURDS: STUMBLING TOWARD
DIALOGUE

REF: 06 ANKARA 6729

¶1. (C) Summary: Both Turkish officials and the PUK representative in Ankara acknowledge the need for greater dialogue between the GOT and KRG leadership on the vexing issues of the PKK and Kirkuk. Turkish MFA asked that the USG weigh in with KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani to bring a positive message to his Feb. 17 meeting with FonMin Gul. The PUK rep alleged that Turkey would foment violence in Kirkuk and occupy part of northern Iraq should it fail in its mission to delay the referendum in Kirkuk beyond 2007. End summary.

¶2. (C) We met Feb. 2 with Bahros Galali, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's representative to Turkey. Galali reported that he had spoken recently with Iraqi President and PUK head Jalal Talabani to urge him to agree to pursue an initiative to reach out to the Turkish government. Galali lamented the poor state of relations and lack of direct communication between Iraqi Kurds and the GOT, and said Talabani shared that concern.

¶3. (C) Apparently under Talabani's instructions to reach out to the GOT, Galali told us he met Feb. 1 with ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) MP and party vice chairman Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat as well as with MFA Head of Department for Iraq Fazli Corman to underscore the willingness of the Iraqi Kurds to send a senior joint KDP/PUK delegation to Turkey or to host a GOT delegation in Iraqi Kurdistan if the GOT would prefer to meet there. He stressed the need for both parties to stop communicating via the media and urged both Firat and Corman to contact him or other Kurdish representatives directly to express their concerns. While Galali believed a joint PUK/KDP delegation would be the best interlocutor for the GOT, the PUK was prepared to meet alone with GOT officials if Ankara was uncomfortable meeting with Barzani's representatives.

¶4. (C) Galali said he would invite the GOT to send officials to Kirkuk to investigate for themselves what he termed the "exaggerated claims" that Iraqi Kurds have moved upwards of 600,000 Kurds into Kirkuk in an attempt to make the referendum on the future status of the area and its annexation into the Kurdish-controlled region of Iraq a fait accompli. Galali also claimed a delegation representing Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi militia had met Talabani in

Baghdad yesterday and had signaled its support for eventual inclusion of Kirkuk in the Kurdish region.

15. (C) Referring to the constant drumbeat of Turkish commentary decrying the possible inclusion of Kirkuk into Iraq's Kurdish region, Galali said he believes the GOT's approach will be to do what it can to ensure the referendum on the future of Kirkuk scheduled to take place in 2007 is postponed through continued pressure on Iraqi Kurds and on the Government of Iraq. If that fails, Turkey will proceed to attempt to spark a war in Kirkuk using both Turkomans and Sunni Arabs and, in support of that and to ensure violence does not spill over into Turkey, Galali claimed the GOT would occupy northern Iraq along the Turkish border.

16. (C) Galali noted Corman accused Masoud Barzani of supporting the PKK. Galali admitted that Barzani had not been particularly helpful in the way he engages with PKK leaders. However, Galali stressed that "we can't fight against the PKK. We did it before and lost far too many Peshmerga." We acknowledged this, but pointed out a number of steps the GOI and Iraqi Kurds could take against the PKK: making a clear and public statement (from the GOI) that the PKK is a terrorist organization; isolating PKK strongholds and cutting off their ability to resupply with either GOI forces or Peshmerga; and keeping PKK leader Murat Karayilan off Barzani-controlled Kurdish television or other media outlets.

17. (C) Subsequent to this meeting but also on Feb. 2, we met with the GOT's Deputy Special Envoy for Iraq, Murat Ozcelik, as well as Corman, who confirmed a number of details of his

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conversation with Galali. Corman said that Galali seemed unaware that FonMin Gul planned to meet KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani "on an informal basis" on Feb. 17 in Istanbul. Corman continued that he would be surprised if Galali had not known about the planned meeting, speculating that Galali may have pitched the joint KDP-PUK delegation idea (an old one, actually--see reftel) because of PUK concern that the Barzani meeting might somehow give the KDP an upper hand.

18. (C) Corman ruefully acknowledged that Turkey has missed an opportunity to improve its relations with the Iraqi Kurds by not inviting Talabani to Turkey. He insisted that FonMin Gul strongly supports a Talabani visit, but implied that President Sezer has simply refused to invite his counterpart to Ankara. Asked if this would change after Sezer is replaced in mid-May, Corman hoped so. We said that the GOT would send an important and positive signal if Turkey's new president were immediately to invite Talabani here.

19. (C) On the Nechirvan Barzani-Gul meeting, Ozcelik asked that we press the KRG to send positive messages to Turkey on both the PKK and Kirkuk issues. Ozcelik stressed that Gul wants to improve GOT-KRG relations, but will be unable to do so if Nechirvan gives no ground in their meeting, or worse, takes their differences to the press during his visit. We responded that Turkey should also take a positive line with Barzani, and in particular needs to cool down its public rhetoric on Kirkuk.

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